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The Order of Knowing: Juan Luis Vives on Language, Thought,  
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# *The Order of Knowing: Juan Luis Vives on Language, Thought, and the Topics*

Lodi Nauta

## I. INTRODUCTION

Friend of Erasmus and Thomas More, the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540) was a prominent voice in sixteenth-century debates on language and learning between humanists and Scholastics. His vast oeuvre includes the highly polemical *Against the Pseudodialecticians* on the language and methods of the Scholastics, and his massive encyclopedia of the arts, *De disciplinis*, in twenty books. The two principal sections of *De disciplinis*—a critique of the Aristotelian Organon and of some later medieval developments (*De causis corruptarum artium*) and a theory of education (*De tradendis disciplinis*)—were complemented by a series of smaller treatises on rhetoric and dialectic.<sup>1</sup> Together with his major work on rhetoric, *De ratione dicendi*, they form the backbone of Vives's program of linguistic and educational reform. Dealing with various aspects of language, speech, argumentation, and composition, they contain valuable insights on language and its crucial role in human society, culture, and in the acquisition of knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> See Peter Mack, "Vives's Contributions to Rhetoric and Dialectic," in *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, ed. Charles Fantazzi (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 227–76 for an excellent discussion of these works. Unless otherwise stated all references are to Gregorio Mayans y Siscar's edition, J. L. Vives, *Opera Omnia* (8 vols., Valencia, 1782–90; repr. London, 1964), henceforth abbreviated as M.

Scholars do not always agree on the originality and significance of Vives's contributions to these fields, however. For some he is "one of the most original philosophers of language" of the Renaissance, who even comes close to anticipating modern logical achievements such as Bertrand Russell's type theory or John Lyons's semantics.<sup>2</sup> For others he is a timid, half-hearted follower of Lorenzo Valla (ca. 1406–57), whose views on language and knowledge were congenial to Vives, yet apparently too radical for him to endorse.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars also agree that Vives was not very innovative in dialectics but nevertheless think that his work embodies "an original, unified and distinctively sixteenth-century account of the art of thinking and composition, articulated in a set of related moves," pointing especially to Vives's original observations on rhetorical themes such as style, decorum, emotional manipulation, and forms of writing.<sup>4</sup> And while historians of logic and medieval philosophy are generally negative about the contributions to dialectic by humanists such as Vives, who has thrown out "the good with the bad,"<sup>5</sup> historians of Renaissance humanism, on the other hand, have praised him for what they see as a radical break with Scholasticism, and his insistence on the historical embeddedness of language and human culture.<sup>6</sup>

It is not surprising that scholars have interpreted Vives's position in different ways. Standing between medieval and modern times, between old and new modes of thinking and writing, and living at a time when Aristotelian Scholasticism had come under attack but the new science and philosophy had not yet crystallized, it is only to be expected that we find a certain ambivalence toward the traditional and the more innovative expressions of Vives's philosophical ideas. For instance, his formulations sometimes suggest a passive role for language, but the rhetorician in Vives realized that language could take on an active role, shaping the way we think, feel, and

<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Coseriu, "Zur Sprachtheorie von Juan Luis Vives," in *Aus der französischen Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte. Festschrift Walter Mönch* (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1971), 234–55, on 234 and 254; H. E. Brekle, *Einführung in die Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 109, n. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 113–33.

<sup>4</sup> Mack, "Vives's Contributions," 242.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Broadie, *Introduction to Medieval Logic*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 197. Cf. William Kneale and Martha Kneale, *The Development of Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 298–316.

<sup>6</sup> See several contributions to *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, including Fantazzi's introduction, with full bibliography; Valerio Del Nero, *Linguaggio e filosofia in Vives. L'organizzazione del sapere nel "De disciplinis" (1531)* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1991); Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970).

hence respond to the world. And while some of his formulations suggest a belief in a stable order of essences, independent of human categorization, other formulations seem to give priority to the shaping power of the human mind, governed by the topics (*loci*). At times Vives can sound like a realist, while he also sometimes endorses a nominalist position.

Building on much excellent recent work on Vives, I will try to locate these philosophical “tensions” against the background of his critique of what he regarded as the useless and misleading abstractions of Scholastic-Aristotelian thought. Like other humanists, Vives was convinced that the Scholastics’ metaphysical and logical apparatus, expressed in abstract and technical language, had blocked our view of the world of concrete individual things. For him linguistic and philosophical abstraction were thus two sides of the same coin, and his program of educational and linguistic reform, greatly inspired by classical rhetoric and by his predecessors Valla and Rudolph Agricola (1444–85), was aimed at clearing away what he (rightly or not) regarded as Scholastic abstractions in order to return to the world of concrete things (*res*), described in a language that matches our experience of this world. From a more general point of view, Vives’s ideas on language, knowledge, and the role which the topics play as organizing principles of knowledge can thus be taken as an illustration of a wider trend that scholars have observed in the Renaissance: a move, often antimetaphysical in spirit, away from the abstract and the general toward the concrete, the singular, and the empirical.<sup>7</sup>

## II. KNOWLEDGE AND LANGUAGE AS FUNCTIONS OF MAN’S NATURAL CONDITION

A central feature of Vives’s views of language and knowledge is his insistence that they are functions of man’s biological nature. In several places in his works Vives starts therefore with a brief sketch of the early origins of human civilization to show how acquisition of knowledge and the development of language to communicate that knowledge are grounded in man’s natural condition governed by the principle that they seek the good and avoid the harmful. From distinguishing harmful from beneficial food to the

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Panagiotis Kondylis, *Die neuzeitliche Metaphysikkritik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990). B. W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Eckhard Kessler, “Humanismus und Naturwissenschaft bei Rudolf Agricola,” in *L’Humanisme allemand (1480–1540)* (Munich: Fink, 1979), 141–57.

invention of crafts and arts, man's *ingenium*—as Vives stresses—was crucial in securing a safe place in a dangerous world and in building up social communities when humans left their caves. Though speaking here only of human beings, Vives generally follows the common wisdom that all living creatures have a natural inclination toward self-preservation, and that the emotions—in themselves neither good nor bad—play a vital role in avoiding the harmful and seeking the beneficial.<sup>8</sup> But it was man who was given a higher rational faculty by God, by which man was able to transcend the here and now, using reason to inquire into things, to gaze over past, present, and future, to “examine all things, to collect, to compare, and to roam through the universe of nature as if it were his own possessions.”<sup>9</sup>

From these early beginnings man began to build up knowledge, and this gradual development of knowledge, crafts, the arts, and sciences is a recurrent theme in Vives's works. Probably inspired by Aristotle's *Politics* and Cicero's *De inventione*, Vives then tells the story of socialization, from closely-knit families to larger communities that started to build villages and cities, which required the introduction of laws and government. Obviously, speech is a crucial element in this story, also grounded in man's natural condition.<sup>10</sup> Without suggesting that human speech developed out of animal sounds, as Lucretius did in his *De rerum natura*, Vives does link the two together: man shares with animals the uttering of sounds for expressing feelings and desires (*motus quosdam animi et affectiones*), and some animals who live in communities such as bees and ants “emit signs [*signa*] somewhat similar to human speech.”<sup>11</sup> These natural sounds are what grammarians traditionally called “interjections,” and elsewhere Vives refers to this category, stating that while sounds in animals are signs of their emotions, in man they are signs of their “entire mental life [*animi universi*]: mind, imagination, emotions, intelligence and the will.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *De anima et vita* 3 (M 3:422–36); a modern edition is M. Sancipriano, *De anima et vita* (Padua: Gregoriana, 1974). Cf. C. G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives and the Emotions* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); Lorenzo Casini, *Cognitive and Moral Psychology in Renaissance Philosophy: A Study of Juan Luis Vives' De anima et vita* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2006), 138–59.

<sup>9</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 1, 1 (M 6:243); Foster Watson, trans., *Vives: On Education* (Cambridge, 1913; repr. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971), 11; cf. *ibid.*, 6:298, trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 90. I also refer to the Italian translation, with useful notes: *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, trans. Valerio Del Nero (Florence: Olschki, 2011), 3; cf. 73.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. *De causis corruptarum artium* 4, 1 (M 6:152: justice and language).

<sup>11</sup> Lucretius *De rerum natura* book 5, 1028–90; Vives, *De ratione dicendi*, 1,1 (M 2:93). A good edition, with Spanish translation, is Vives, *Del arte del hablar*, ed. J. M. Rodríguez Peregrina (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> *De anima et vita* 2, 7 (M 3:372) and *De censura veri* 1 (M 3:143) where Vives adds

Vives does not offer much speculation on the details of this gradual development from simple to more complicated forms of language, but he observes that languages naturally developed from simple to more complicated systems of signs: “By the help of speech, their minds, which had been hidden by concentration on bodily needs, began to reveal themselves; single words [*verba singula*] were attended to, then phrases and modes of speaking [*phrases ac loquendi modi*], as they were appropriate for use, i.e. as they were marked by public agreement of opinion, which is, as it were, what a mint is to current coin.”<sup>13</sup> Primitive languages are thus characterized by a simple structure, being almost concatenations of nouns referring to concrete objects, without syncategorematic words such as “all,” “if,” “and,” “unless,” “only,” and “except.” They also generally lacked words that refer to grammatical and logical categories such as “noun,” “verb,” “syllable,” and “syllogism,” for which Vives uses the traditional name of secondary words (*secundaria*) or words of words (*nominum nomina*). Stylistic refinements were also not on the minds of early speakers: they spoke “rambling or disconnected [*dissolute*] nor did they connect parts of a sentence rhythmically [*alligabant numeris*].”<sup>14</sup> As the analogy between the early stage of mankind and that of an individual was never far away from such thinking, Vives also compares this early language with the language of children, who likewise do not yet make well-connected sentences; they use separate words for individual things, without having yet formed abstract concepts, nor do they use syncategorematic and higher order words.<sup>15</sup>

How the process went on Vives does not tell. Like other humanists he clearly recognizes different forms of Latin in antiquity, and he suggests that “from Greek discourse came the Latin; from the Latin, the Italian, Spanish, French were derived,” but knowledge of the earliest stages that preceded the Greek language was a field of speculation into which Vives did not enter.<sup>16</sup> At one point in the *De tradendis disciplinis*, he refers to “that original language in which Adam attached the names to things” and to the diversity of languages as a punishment of sin, but this is an isolated remark and

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that some interjections in Latin and Greek may transcend the level of purely natural sounds and may be regarded as parts of speech.

<sup>13</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 1, 1 (M 6:245; trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 14; trans. Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 5–6); cf. Cicero, *De oratore* 2.38.159; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.3.

<sup>14</sup> *De ratione dicendi* 1, 6 (M 2:116–17).

<sup>15</sup> *De censura veri* I (M 3:144–45); *De anima et vita* 2, 7 (M 3:369–70; ed. Sancipriano, *De anima et vita*, 302); *ibid.*, 2, 8 (3:372; 312).

<sup>16</sup> *De ratione dicendi* I, 1 (M 2:95–96); *De tradendis disciplinis* 3, 1 (M 6:300–301; trans.

is not followed up by an attempt to trace words back to a pre-Babylonian language—an attempt that a contemporary such as Luther would have deemed fruitless anyway after the radical dispersion of languages after Babel.<sup>17</sup>

Usually, Vives emphasizes the natural growth of language, knowledge, culture, and the arts from their early origins to later times, and though he does not develop it explicitly his view is that the early rise of language must be located in the small communities of primitive people who started using groans, grunts, cries, and other sounds for communicating their feelings, desires, plans, beliefs, and ideas. Just as the acquisition of knowledge started as a necessary consequence of man's natural condition but developed gradually into systems of arts and sciences, so speech as something that is natural to us (*loqui naturale est nobis*) developed into systems of conventional signs, governed by art and convention.<sup>18</sup>

### III. FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

From Vives's sketches of the early conditions we can distill a variety of functions that he assigns to language. Its main function is to be an instrument for thought, that is, an expression of what goes on inside the mind. Without language our thoughts, "shut in by the grossness and density of the body," remain hidden.<sup>19</sup> To describe this primary function Vives employs several metaphors of a rather traditional kind: language as a river that flows from its source or as water from its fountain, that is the mind; or words as the body, and thought as the soul and hence as the "life of words," language as the seat (*sedes*) of thought or its "image" (*imago*).<sup>20</sup> These metaphors suggest that the direction of influence is unilateral: words are used for expressing what has been thought out by the mind.

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Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 94; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 77) on derivation of languages.

<sup>17</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 3, 1 (M 6:299; trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 93; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 74). See Coseriu, "Zur Sprachtheorie von Juan Luis Vives," 238, identifying the passage correctly as a "Fremdkörper." Luther, *In primum librum Mosi enarrationes*, fol. 169, cited C.-G. Dubois, *Mythe et langage au seizième siècle* (Bordeaux: Ducros, 1970), 53.

<sup>18</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 3, 1 (M 6:298; trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 90, whose translation, unlike Del Nero's, overlooks the distinction between speech, which is natural, and language, which is art: "loqui naturale est nobis, hanc vero linguam, aut illam artis"); Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 73.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *De ratione dicendi* I, 1 and 2, 1 (M 2:94 and 130); *De anima et vita* 2, 7 (M 3:371; ed. Sancipriano, *De anima et vita*, 308). *De tradendis disciplinis* 3, 1 (M 6:298; trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 90; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 73).



Of course language is not such a neutral verbalization, but it exercises considerable influence on our mental life, indeed on all aspects of life: “No course of life whatever, and no human activity can continue without speech.”<sup>21</sup> In words that echo ancient rhetoricians but also contemporary humanists such as Agricola and Giovanni Pontano (1429–1503), Vives writes that “emotions of the mind are enflamed by the sparks of speech, and so too reason is impelled and moved by speech,” and thus “in the whole kingdom of the activities of man, speech holds in its possession a mighty strength which it continually manifests.” The power of language also affects our judgment: “It should have the capacity to explain most aptly what they think. By its means much power of judgment should be developed.” Language is therefore not the neutral instrument that some traditional metaphors suggest (such as a servant that serves reason as its master, or as clothing for the body) but can “leave stings in the minds of the audience [*in animis audientium*],” and is thus an active, shaping influence on our mental and emotional life.<sup>22</sup>

From the perspective of the community language is not just the expression of the thoughts of an individual but the social bond that ties people together. As a humanist with a more than solid grounding in ancient rhetoric, Vives underscores frequently the social as well as the socializing effect of language as praised, e.g., by Cicero. The close link between language and civilization is a running theme throughout Vives’s *De disciplinis* (and in humanist thought generally), which also voices the typically humanist sentiment that ignorance and corruption of the Latin language is an important cause of the downfall of the arts and sciences in the post-classical era. But while the *De disciplinis* focuses on Latin as the storehouse of learning and language of the church, Vives realizes full well that the socializing effects of language are marked features of any language, even of what he regards as the gibberish of his Scholastic teachers in Paris, whose identity as a social group was formed by the bond of their technical terminology. Hence, his treatise on rhetoric is introduced not as a work on Latin rhetoric but on rules for effective and sound communication in any language (*non unius modo vel alterius linguae sed in commune omnium*), even though obviously

<sup>21</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 4, 3 (M 6:356; trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 181; Del Nero, *L’insegnamento delle discipline*, 155). Next quotations 4, 3 and 3, 1 (M 6:356 and 298; trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 180, 91; Del Nero, *L’insegnamento delle discipline*, 154–55; 74).

<sup>22</sup> *De ratione dicendi* 2, 5 (M 2:146). Cicero, *De oratore* 1.8.30–33; 3.14.15. Cf. Giovanni Pontano, *De sermone*, ed. S. Lupi and A. Risicato (Lugano: Lucani, 1953), 3–4. For Vives on emotions see n. 8.

Latin is his model and his source of inspiration and examples.<sup>23</sup> For Vives the notion of language as *instrumentum societatis humanae* implies that we get to know a culture and its learned traditions by studying its language. Language is the gate to the treasury (*sacrarium*) of culture and learning, hence students should “gain as much of the language as will enable them to penetrate to those facts and ideas, which are contained in these languages, like beautiful and valuable things are locked up in treasuries.”<sup>24</sup> Vives does not develop this insight in any anthropological way, much less arrive at a notion of linguistic relativism. Yet he often refers to the fact, well known to translators, that every language has “its own appropriateness of speech, called *idioma* by the Greeks,”<sup>25</sup> not to mention its own meaning and charm (*vis et gratia*), and that languages obviously have their own rules, customs, and conventions, e.g., in the use of negatives, in the composition of words, and in countless other linguistic phenomena.<sup>26</sup> Vives’s well-known emphasis on linguistic custom, though certainly not new with him, follows directly from his view of language as a social binding force.

We should of course not distinguish too sharply between these functions of language—language as expression of thought, as instrument of the social bond, as treasure house of learning and culture—because for Vives these are clearly aspects of one and the same picture. He elucidates this picture in *De ratione dicendi* by analyzing four purposes of speech: namely, to explain, to prove, to move, and to please, derived from the classical three aims to teach, to move, and to please.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, these functions of language are presented as a consequence of man’s postlapsarian condition. In the pristine, ideal situation about which Vives remains vague, communication was a completely transparent process: speakers expressed themselves in the clearest terms, listeners understood it perfectly, and there was no weak link nor manipulation or deceit in this communication of thoughts.<sup>28</sup> In the pristine situation, the natural purpose of this God-given gift was just

<sup>23</sup> *De ratione dicendi* 2, 2 (M 2:94). Cf. Pontano, whose aim in *De sermone* (ed. Lupi and Risicato, 5) is to deal with common discourse (*oratio communis*) rather than formal oratory and rhetoric.

<sup>24</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 3, 1 and 4, 1 (M 6:298 and 345, trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 91 and 163; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 74, 139).

<sup>25</sup> *In Pseudo-Dialecticos* (M 3:48; 142–43); Juan Luis Vives, *In Pseudodialecticos: A Critical Edition*, ed. and trans. Charles Fantazzi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 56; 59–61; Vives, *Against the Pseudodialecticians: A Humanist Attack on Medieval Logic*, trans. Rita Guerlac (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), 68; 134–36.

<sup>26</sup> *De causis corruptarum artium* 3, 6 (M 6:143); *In Pseudo-Dialecticos* (M 3:47); ed. Fantazzi, *In Pseudodialecticos*, 55; Guerlac, *Against the Pseudodialecticians*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> M 2, 11–15 (M 2:155–58).

<sup>28</sup> *De ratione dicendi*, 2, 11 (M 2:156).

to express one's thought. The "natural purpose" (*naturalis finis*) of language then is explanation. But "explanation no longer sufficed" after sin (*delictum*) had darkened the human mind, and proving and persuading became necessary tools as ignorance, deceit, partisanship, and confusion entered human relations. But this does not mean that for Vives language is a necessary evil: it can be used for evil purposes, but just as the emotions are neutral in themselves (*neutri*), so language too is something that can be used in evil and good ways—already in antiquity a traditional defense of rhetoric.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the ideal situation seems just that: an ideal, almost hypothetical situation, as humans are not spiritual angels who can just read each others' minds. But it does mean that for Vives even more moral weight is put upon the use of language, language being a vital element in the moral education of children: just as human behavior should be ruled by reasonableness, prudence, modesty, piety, a love for truth, and a regard for the social and moral well-being of fellow humans, so the use of language should be geared to these ends and exercised by the same virtues.<sup>30</sup>

So in itself (*in re ipsa*) language has just one purpose—to explain—but related to us (*nostri*) three: "to prove, to move, and to keep the attention of the audience [*pascere*] by speech."<sup>31</sup> Inspired by Agricola, Vives divides explanation into teaching and proving, and describes these functions in terms often derived from Agricola, whose work he knew well.<sup>32</sup> Just like Agricola, Vives has a keen eye for all the elements that go into effective communication: "we have to consider the personality of the speaker and of the listener, and the nature of the particular business in hand, to decide what are the means suitable to produce a particular effect in relation to a particular place and time, having regard to the particular speaker and listener."<sup>33</sup> This is true for any kind of situation but in particular in the case of the emotional appeal of a speech:

Before everything else we must consider who we are and who are the people whose emotions we wish to arouse or placate, what is

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *De tradendis disciplinis* 4, 3 (M 6:357, trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 181; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 155). On emotions being "neutral" (*neutri*), see *De ratione dicendi* 2, 11 (M 2:156).

<sup>30</sup> *De causis corruptarum artium* 4, 1 (M 6:152).

<sup>31</sup> *De ratione dicendi* 2, 11 (M 2:157); cf. *De tradendis disciplinis* 4, 3 (M 6:357; trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 181; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 155).

<sup>32</sup> For Vives's debt to Agricola see Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument. Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 314–19.

<sup>33</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 4, 3 (M 6:357, trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 182; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 155).

their judgment of the matter in question, what do they value greatly, what very little, which emotions are they liable to, which immune from, out of which emotions do they move easily to which ones. . . . We must put on their mind and their whole character while we are thinking about what would benefit our case and we must put ourselves in their place, that is, we must consider diligently, supposing we were them, that is, if we have the same convictions about things as them, by what means we would now be moved (or placated) in the present business. This act of imagining [*phantasia*] is wonderfully adapted for finding out what we must do.<sup>34</sup>

Like humanists such as Agricola and Pontano, Vives develops here ideas that were pivotal elements in ancient rhetoric. The psychological mechanism by which we can recognize mutual emotions and hence can put ourselves in someone else's place was well known to ancient orators and philosophers.<sup>35</sup> Vives's observations are acute, testifying to his great sensitivity to the varied use of language depending on context.

#### IV. THE ORDER OF KNOWING AND THE ORDER OF THE WORLD

But while moving and persuading are important in contexts in which a speaker wants to get his or her audience to believe, accept, or deny a position, explaining is important in many other contexts in which we simply want to make ourselves understood without aiming primarily to create belief in an audience: "the aim of this kind of speech is to be understood: of the speaker truly to explain what he conceives in his mind and conveys to the hearer."<sup>36</sup> This might suggest a rather unproblematic correspondence between man's cognitive powers, finely adapted to their function, and the world with which man becomes familiar. But Vives's optimism about the cognitive process is at times qualified by his belief that postlapsarian man cannot know the true essences of things. Before we can discuss Vives's solution to bridge the gap between the essential structure of the world and the

<sup>34</sup> *De ratione dicendi* 2, 60 (M 2:165–66); trans. Peter Mack, "Vives's *De arte dicendi*: Structure, Innovations, Problems," *Rhetorica* 23 (2005): 81.

<sup>35</sup> Cicero, *De oratore* 3.59.223, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), 179; cf. 2.44.189–90; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 6.2.26. Pontano, *De sermone*, ed. Lupi and Risicato, 41.

<sup>36</sup> *De ratione dicendi* 2, 47 (M 2:158); trans. Mack, "Vives's *De arte dicendi*," 80.

human mind, we must therefore briefly look at his epistemology, which is a natural outcome of his view of the early origins of man's cognitive powers.

Vives accepts the Aristotelian theory of the acquisition of knowledge as a combination of sense perception and reason: based on a careful and repeated observation of a whole range of phenomena, reason has to take an inductive step from these observations to general conclusions:

In the beginning, first one, then another experience, through wonder at its novelty, was noted down for use in life; from a number of separate experiments the mind gathered a universal law, which, after support and confirmation by many experiments was considered certain and established.<sup>37</sup>

But if the experiments (that is, observations) do not agree with the general pattern or rule, we (or later generations) should continue the search:

in teaching the arts, we shall collect many experiments and observe the experience of many teachers, so that from them general rules may be formed. If some of the experiments do not agree with the rule, then the reason why this happens must be noted down. If there are more deviations than agreements or an equal number, a dogma must not be established from the fact, but the facts must be transmitted to the astonishment of posterity, so that from astonishment . . . philosophy may grow.<sup>38</sup>

As already noticed, Vives thinks this growth of knowledge is the result of a natural, inborn inclination of man to seek out the beneficial and avoid the harmful. This principle also explains why we have an inborn sense of good and bad, and an inner conscience that praises and blames ourselves and others, and why all people have a notion of a god (*Deum esse*).<sup>39</sup> Indeed the mind has a "natural kinship," also called "affinity," "friendship," or "affection," with "the first principles from which, as from seeds, other truths proceed."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* I, 2 (M 6:250, trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 20; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 11).

<sup>38</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 2, 4 (M 6:296, trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 87–88; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 70).

<sup>39</sup> *De prima philosophia* I (M 3:186).

<sup>40</sup> *De instrumento probabilitatis* (M 3:82); Mack, "Vives's Contributions," 245; Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives*, 249; Casini, *Cognitive and Moral Psychology*, 40–41, referring to Cicero, *Academica* 2.31 and *De natura deorum* 3.17.

This Stoic notion of innateness, popularized for instance by Boethius in his *Consolation of Philosophy*, had always been a good answer to the Platonic idea that knowledge is a recollection of things that the soul already knew before birth. But this optimism is toned down by Vives's Christian picture of fallen man. Though duly invoking the prelapsarian condition of man in which perfect knowledge was possible, Vives does not elaborate on it, and seems to regard the fallen condition of man as a given, that is, as the natural situation in which we find ourselves. This condition sets limits on what we can know, and Vives repeatedly states that we cannot know the inner essences of things but only sensible qualities. In his early *De initiis, sectis et laudibus philosophiae* from 1518, he writes, for instance, that the New Academy under the leadership of Lacydes and Carneades argued that "things could not be understood and accordingly that nobody could rightly affirm or know anything, both because of the inherent difficulty of the things being studied and because of the frailty and obscurity of the human mind."<sup>41</sup> Like his predecessor Agricola who thought that there were many things about which we do not have certainty, Vives also thinks that we can reach only probable knowledge: "What knowledge we have gained can only be reckoned as probable and not assumed as absolutely true."<sup>42</sup> In short, knowledge of essences is at best a well-informed guess or conjecture on the basis of sense perception, at worst a sheer impossibility. Investigations of nature can never result in indubitable knowledge and absolute certainty but are always approximations, the quality of which depends on our data and our reasoning process.

But how far does this skeptical sentiment go? Here we come to an important issue in Vives's thought. Is there such an order of essences "deep down," unavailable for the human mind, or is the order as we see it all there is? If the human mind can reach no deeper than the outer surface of what we see, it might seem to follow that reality is dependent on our epistemic categorizations. And indeed we find Vives frequently stating—and in this he seems to follow Valla—that knowledge is always dependent on how we see things and think about them (*ex sententia animi nostri censemus*,

<sup>41</sup> In Vives, *Early Writings*, ed. C. Matheussen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 39; *De prima philosophia* I (M 3:194); cf. Casini, *Cognitive and Moral Psychology*, 36. Agricola, *De inventionem dialectica*, with Alardus's commentary (Cologne, 1539; repr. Nieuwkoop, 1967), 2.

<sup>42</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 4, 1 (M 6:347–48, trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 166–67; Del Nero, *L'insegnamento delle discipline*, 142), but in *De prima philosophia* Vives rejects Protagorean relativism (M 3:194).

*non ex rebus ipsis*), and on how we judge things to be; how things are in themselves we cannot know.<sup>43</sup>

## V. TOPICS AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN MIND AND REALITY

Our epistemic categories cannot simply be of our own making; they must ultimately be grounded in reality. Here is where the topics come in. The topics, as we know, were a set of places (*loci*) such as definition, genus, species, place, time, whole/part, and so on, for inventing arguments. They had a long and complicated history behind them when Agricola composed his *De inventione dialectica* in the late 1470s (published posthumously only in 1515), in which he organized the rhetorical and dialectical sets into one system of topical invention, based on the lists of Cicero and Boethius (who had used that of the Aristotelian Themistius).<sup>44</sup> Agricola thus departed from Boethius who had emphasized the difference between rhetoric and dialectic, each with its own system of topics, and returned to Cicero's more flexible, pragmatic use of the topics. For Agricola the topics formed a logic of inquiry rather than a system in which the topics as universal propositions should guarantee the validity of assertions made in an argument. The differences between Agricola and late-medieval logicians, which cannot be discussed here, are therefore considerable: in Agricola there is no attempt to reduce topical arguments to syllogisms (though the force of the syllogism remains an ideal even for informal arguments<sup>45</sup>) in the way in which, e.g., William of Sherwood and Peter of Spain tried to do, nor do we find a theory of consequences of a late-terminist kind (as, e.g., in Ockham). Indeed, Agricola rejects Boethius's topical maxims, while these maxims, whose function it was to lend power to syllogisms or to complete imperfect syllogisms, formed an important ingredient in medieval dialectic.<sup>46</sup> From the treatments

<sup>43</sup> *De prima philosophia* I (M 3:194); cf. Valla, *Dialectical Disputations*, ed. and trans. Brian P. Copenhaver and Lodi Nauta (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1:32–34; cf. Lodi Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense: Lorenzo Valla's Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 68–71.

<sup>44</sup> Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 117–67; Marc Cogan, "Rodolphus Agricola and the Semantic Revolutions of the History of Invention," *Rhetorica* 2 (1984): 163–94; Ann Moss, *Printed commonplace-books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 77–80.

<sup>45</sup> Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 141–42.

<sup>46</sup> See Otto Bird, "The Tradition of the Logical Topics: Aristotle to Ockham," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23 (1962): 307–23, on 313. Eleonore Stump, *Dialectic and its Place in the Development of Medieval Logic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 135–56 (terminist logicians, esp. Peter of Spain), 253–58 (Ockham). For Boethius's theory, see

of Cicero, Quintilian, Boethius, and others, Agricola built his own system, geared toward finding effective arguments and laying bare the argumentative structure of texts. It thus enabled the student to organize any type of discourse and analyze texts in terms of underlying questions and argumentative structure. The vast impact of the *De inventione dialectica* is telling evidence of changing intellectual circumstances in the sixteenth century.<sup>47</sup>

For Agricola, and also for Vives, the topics were thus primarily labels for arguments that we can use concerning a particular subject matter.<sup>48</sup> But the topics as labels of arguments are derived from a consideration of things and what things have in common such as substance, quality, action, cause, and effect, and indeed many of the topics are presented as reflecting the things themselves. Agricola's topics, for instance, are divided into "internal" topics, which are "within the substance of a thing" (e.g., genus, species, property/difference, whole, part) or "bring a certain manner or disposition to it" (adjacents, actions, subject), and "external" topics, which refer to "necessarily joined aspects" (e.g., causes, effects, place, time), and so on.<sup>49</sup> What Vives learned from Agricola (and the Ciceronian-Boethian tradition on which the latter was based) was to see the topics not just as places of argumentation but as grounded in reality, though some topics more directly than others. As Mack writes, Agricola seems to believe that "connections between the terms of propositions" are grounded in "similar connections really existing in the world": "The implication that the connections named by the topics exist in the world appears to suit some topics (such as causes) better than others (such as similitudes)."<sup>50</sup> We might expect therefore to find a rather fluid transition from speaking about the world to speaking about the human mind that notices common aspects of things, deriving from these features certain headings that direct the mind to notice these aspects of reality.

We can see this bridge-function at work in treatises that deal with the

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her translations with studies: Boethius's "*De topicis differentiis*" (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) and Boethius' "*In Ciceronis Topica*" (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); N. J. Green-Pedersen, *The Tradition of the Topics in the Middle Ages* (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1984), 330 writes that "probably we must credit Agricola with a rather original achievement," but his conclusion that "Agricola is thinking in terms of rhetoric and not logic when he writes about dialectic," is far from adequate.

<sup>47</sup> Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 257–374.

<sup>48</sup> Vives, *De instrumento probabilitatis* (M 3, 86–115).

<sup>49</sup> *De inventione dialectica*, 22–24; cf. 24 where Agricola writes that his treatment of the topics follows the "nature and order of things" (24).

<sup>50</sup> Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 140–41. For Agricola's view see also Lodi Nauta, "From Universals to Topics: The Realism of Rudolph Agricola, with an Edition of his Reply to a Critic," *Vivarium* 50 (2012): 190–224.



topics: *De instrumento probabilitatis* on topical invention, and a neglected but interesting treatise on the predicables and definition, entitled *De explanatione cuiusque essentiae*. The latter treatise starts with a metaphor between nature and a pharmacist—a metaphor that we find used also in other contexts: just as a pharmacist or a perfumer who has a box full of phials, flasks, and bottles with labels on them identifying what they contain, so nature “divides everything in small boxes [*pixides*] as it were with a name on them, what they have in common: man, horse, adamant, pear, whiteness, blackness, virtue, vice.”<sup>51</sup> Changing the metaphor, Vives compares nature with a city. Just as there are families living in a big city, so things that belong together (apples, horses) can be distinguished in nature. We group things together on the basis of their similarity: “this essential similitude is called a universal in the schools [*in schola*].”<sup>52</sup> While Vives follows common tradition (see below), it is significant that he uses the same metaphor of the pharmacist’s or perfumer’s classification in *De instrumento probabilitatis* but this time in order to refer to the topics rather than to the things themselves: it is now the topics that are compared with labeled phials and bottles.<sup>53</sup> Though the use of the same metaphor might suggest an identification between topics and the real aspects of things, this is of course not Vives’s intention. But because the topics as labels or headings under which we are invited to view and discuss things are based on their common aspects as noticed by the mind (e.g., essence, quality, cause, effect, and so on), the association of things and topics facilitates an easy transition from reality to the mind. Hence, the topics are a reflection of the ontological order and as such an instrument and heuristic aid for the human mind. In searching for similitudes between things, the mind detects common patterns and groups things in categories. This is of course essential for argumentation, as Boethius had already taught: to argue—to put it in its most rudimentary form—that A is B (or not B) requires listing features of A and features of B, and comparing the lists, finding a medium between A and B. Arguments thus connect what is known with what is in doubt and needs proof. The same list of topics can be used in every art and science, and can be of use to a lawyer, physician, mathematician, or orator.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *De explanatione cuiusque essentiae* (M 3:121). In Konrad Gesner we find the same image (and many more other ones) to illustrate the commonplace-book as systematic storage: “an apothecary’s shop with medicinal ingredients neatly stowed in separate containers” (Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 191).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *De instrumento probabilitatis* (M 3:86).

<sup>54</sup> *De instrumento probabilitatis* (M 3:86); on argument as a medium of argumentation see Agricola, *De inventione dialectica*, ed. Alardus, 7–8.

This transition from the order of being to the order of knowing is perhaps eased by Vives's ambiguous use of the traditional word "similitude," an ambiguity that we find in his predecessor Agricola, and also, arguably, in many thinkers who were indebted to the classical account by Boethius. In Boethius's discussion universals seem to have a dual existence: they exist both in particular things and as concepts in our mind.<sup>55</sup> The mind abstracts doghood after observing many dogs, noticing the similitude between them, and forming the concept of doghood. The concept would be null and void if there were nothing in extramental reality that corresponded to that concept. But Boethius does not want to give up the Aristotelian principle that everything that exists is one in number. Hence, universals must be said to be particular as sensed in particular things—they might be identified with the "likenesses" between things—but universal as grasped in thought.

Vives's position comes close to the Boethian account but is probably directly indebted to Agricola. Thus, on the one hand Vives, following tradition, equates similitudes with the inner essences of things, calling them "universals," and saying that similitudes between things exist in reality, independent of our thinking and linguistic expression (*extra nomina atque intelligentias nostras*) "since the similitude is in the things themselves, or rather the things themselves are similar and conforming to each other."<sup>56</sup> This similitude can be called a "nature, manner, reason, form, or sign [*natura seu conditio seu ratio seu forma seu nota*]" and "genus for wider groups and species for smaller more limited groups." On the other hand, similitude also refers to what these essences, unknown to the human mind, effect at the level of what is visible and knowable to the human mind: qualities and actions. The similarities are what things have in common, and these common features are ultimately caused by the inner essences.

Now for Vives this noticing of similarities is aided and structured by the topics. The topics as "common headings" refer to the common condition of things: each thing belongs to a certain genus; has a certain substance; is caused by something; has a certain effect; is at a certain place; and so on. Thus, although the nature of individual things eludes us, we can observe the similarities and differences between things: "there is nothing in nature

<sup>55</sup> For a convenient text see Paul Vincent Spade, *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1994), 20–25; cf. John Marenbon, *Boethius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 23–32.

<sup>56</sup> *De explanatione* (M 3:124): ". . . genus hoc aut species non modo in nominibus vel nostris intelligentiis est situm, sed in natura rerum est ea similitudo ac communio, etiam extra nomina atque intelligentias nostras; est enim in ipsis rebus seu potius res ipsae similes conformesque."

which is not joined to something else by the bond of comparison [*similitudinis nodo*].”<sup>57</sup> Inspired by Agricola, Vives sees the topics as a set of universal aspects of things that help to bring order to the immense variety of nature. But he is also taking over a certain ambiguity from Agricola’s account, an account that he had helped to edit after Agricola’s death: topics are based on the condition of things, yet they are not identical with them.<sup>58</sup> The genus animal in a horse, for instance, is not identical with the topic genus that has led the mind to look for the type of genus in that horse, to be used in argument. The yellowness that two things have in common is not the same as the topic of “contingent” that has led the mind to look for common accidents in these things. This close connection between topics and things is also what causes the ambiguity in Vives’s account: as similitudes topics are called the essences of things while they also are the set of categories that organize the features we see.

We can now understand why scholars have found it difficult to characterize Vives’s ontological position. On the one hand, he admits that the agreements between things must be based on something that is independent of human thinking and linguistic expression, “since the similitude is in the things themselves, or rather the things themselves are similar and conforming to each other” species and genus are not dependent on our categorization (*non modo in nominibus vel nostris intelligentiis*).<sup>59</sup> As we have seen, Vives often speaks in terms of essences as hidden cores or natures of things. But he also states that the world consists of individual substances and individual accidents, and that generality in nature can be defined only in terms of what we see as common element in different things. In his *Against the Pseudodialecticians* Vives criticizes realists for confusing the metaphysical and the physical order, and in the *De anima et vita* he also seems to side explicitly with the nominalists when he writes that “there is no universal in the imagination nor in nature; but it is only attained through discursive reason [*ratione discurrente*] under a very confused and very thin image when the mind strips itself off, as best as it can, from the attributes of fantasy.”<sup>60</sup> Thus universal concepts are formed after careful and repeated observation, guided by the grid of the topics, and yet they have a foundation in reality. But this does not mean that the essence of a thing must be a

<sup>57</sup> *De instrumento probabilitatis* (M 3:104).

<sup>58</sup> See Alardus’s statement in the preface to Agricola’s little treatise on universals; *De inventione dialectica*, 36. On the ambiguity see Nauta, “From Universals to Topics,” 213.

<sup>59</sup> See note 56.

<sup>60</sup> *De anima et vita* 2, 1 (M 3:344; ed. Sancipriano, *De anima et vita*, 222); cf. Casini, *Cognitive and Moral Psychology*, 22–23.

“common” entity as if one and the same form of doghood would be instantiated in many individual dogs. The dog Bello has a unique essence that—through its effects in sensible qualities and actions—can be grouped together with the dog Freddie that has its own singular essence revealing qualities and actions very similar to those of Bello. Such a position comes close to the Boethian account, which was certainly not without its own ambiguities.

The topics aid us thus in categorizing things or aspects of things, but they are also used by Vives to suggest a division of *words*: the way in which we carve up reality suggests a division of words (*distinctio nominum*), e.g., words taken from the essence such as “man,” and “rational”; words pointing to qualities such as “whiteness” and “blackness,” names derived from these (“white,” “black”); words referring to the matter, or parts; words that refer to qualities noticed by the exterior sense (“whiteness,” “laughing”) or the interior sense (“understanding,” “prone to laugh”); words referring to comparison or relation (“father,” “son”), or to manner (“crowned,” “armed”); words referring to time and place, or to mixed things, to things which are owned or which own (“richness”); words referring to action and passion, and so on. Vives realizes that the immense variety of words does not allow for any neat categorization. It might not be impossible to put things “in certain boxes” or “assign to certain seats” (*in certas sedes tribuere*), but with words this seems impossible given “the immense variety of words and of languages.”<sup>61</sup> Yet from Vives’s list it is not difficult to recognize the topics that are not just aids in thinking but also in making linguistic categories.

That such a linguistic division also reflects the workings of the topics is not surprising. For if the topics structure what we consign to thought (*verbis sensa consignantur*)—and we have seen that they indeed prompt us to look for, for instance, causes, effects, or parts and whole, attributes, and so on—it is likely that they are also reflected in language which is “the expression of thought.” In some places Vives even suggests that “the power of almost all knowing and understanding lies in words; for in words are perceptions [*sensa*] registered, and all that takes place in the mind and in thought is expressed in words.”<sup>62</sup> This does not mean that Vives endorses a view that holds that language determines thought, but he is willing to see the topics as an important grid that guides our knowledge and speech about the world. What Peter Mack says of Agricola is true for Vives too: “All that

<sup>61</sup> *De explanatione* (M 3:127): “in tanta licentia sermonis et tanta varietate linguarum.”

<sup>62</sup> *De prima philosophia* I (M 3:193).

can be said about something, and all that something is, is to emerge from a consideration of the topics,” and this “provides an explanation for the ways in which the topics are to be used for discovering material and for thought.”<sup>63</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION

Vives’s ideas of language and knowledge, which testify to his wider views on human culture, and his ideas on how this culture should be reformed by education and learning, are clearly the product of his wide reading of Cicero, Quintilian, Boethius, and many other classical sources and also his direct predecessors Valla and Agricola. From these sources he distilled some of the key ideas that I have discussed in this article. What Vives tried to do—in line with his predecessors—is to place the world of concrete things at the center of our attention, and to explore the world directly rather than through what he thought was a superstructure of Scholastic concepts and abstract terminology. Like Agricola he urges his students to study nature, as well as the practical and mechanical arts, suggesting that they enter “shops and factories to ask questions from craftsmen, and get to know about the details of their work.”<sup>64</sup> We have already noticed an emphasis on empirical observation in Vives, and indeed some scholars have regarded him as an empiricist or even a precursor of Francis Bacon.<sup>65</sup> Though there is surely an inquisitive spirit running through Vives’s works, learning remains essentially a bookish affair: his vast encyclopedia of the arts lays down a curriculum of reading. It is also not surprising that the pious Christian in Vives frequently states that learning and also the study of nature are only justifiable if they serve human society and religion. The pragmatic and practical overtones of his educational reform are there to curb the vainglorious scientist or philosopher who pursues learning only for its own sake.

Although Vives’s ideas on language and knowledge did not contribute directly to a program of natural study or empirical observation of nature, one might see in his work an indirect contribution to the creation of an intellectual climate that fostered such explorations. My discussion has

<sup>63</sup> Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 140–41.

<sup>64</sup> *De tradendis disciplinis* 4, 6 (M 6:374, trans. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 209; Del Nero, *L’insegnamento delle discipline*, 176).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Watson, *Vives: On Education*, ciii–cxi; Angelo Crescini, *Le origini del metodo analitico: il cinquecento* (Udine: Del Bianco, 1965), 77–78; Cesare Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell’Umanesimo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968), 635.

pointed to what we may call a “de-essentialization” of universals, that is, a move away from universals as entities that are one and many at the same time, to be dug up by a process of abstraction, to topics as ordering principles that guide human cognition and argumentation. As for Agricola and his sources, for Vives as well the topics reflect similarities in nature directly or less directly.<sup>66</sup> As system they may be said to form a grid through which knowledge can be acquired and arguments formulated. It would be far from the humanist’s mind to deny that there is a stable order of essences, independent of human categorization, yet our knowledge of it can only be had by way of inference on the basis of our seeing connections, and this process of collecting and comparing data is guided (though not determined) by the topics. As we have seen, the topics are a much broader group than the traditional universals of genus, species, difference, and property, and hence constitute a much more flexible set of categories, partly directly reflecting the essential and accidental nature of a thing, and partly less directly when we define a thing or have an opinion about it. They enable Vives thus to suggest what we may call a horizontal ontology in which concrete things, grouped in classes on the basis of what we empirically observe, rather than hierarchies of universals such as genus and species somehow residing in individual things though never identical with them, take center stage—a line of thinking developed by Mario Nizolio (1488–1567), who often mentions Vives in his *De veris principiis*.<sup>67</sup> We see a similar shift in Vives’s ideas on the soul, studied in detail by other scholars. Here too the drift of his argument moves away from a metaphysical consideration of the real nature of the soul toward a description of its phenomenological manifestations.<sup>68</sup>

This is of course not an entirely new phenomenon in the sixteenth century. Already in the later Middle Ages we see Scholastic thinkers turning away from substance and essence and moving toward an examination—or at least a defense of such an approach—of sensible qualities.<sup>69</sup> But what we can see in humanists such as Valla, Agricola, Vives, and Nizolio is that a critique of philosophical abstraction goes hand in hand with a critique of

<sup>66</sup> See note 63.

<sup>67</sup> Nizolio, *De veris principiis et vera ratione philosophandi contra pseudophilosophos*, ed. Q. Breen (2 vols., Rome: Bocca, 1956), index; Lodi Nauta, “Anti-essentialism and the Rhetorization of Knowledge: Mario Nizolio’s Humanist Attack on Universals,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): 31–66.

<sup>68</sup> Already noticed by Wilhelm Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914), 2:423; see Casini, *Cognitive and Moral Psychology*, 16, with further literature.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1671* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 634–35.

linguistic abstraction. These humanists were certainly not alone nor the first to warn against reification and hypostatization, but, equipped with their linguistic and rhetorical training, they could argue that such reification, and hence a belief in abstract entities, was caused by a misunderstanding of language. A philosopher should have a good knowledge of language, for it is “common meaning of words” rather than the technical terminology of the Scholastics that should be followed (*communis verborum usus; sensus communis; verbis de vulgo sumtis*).<sup>70</sup> Even metaphysics is a discipline that must take its starting-point from common usage, laying bare (*enucleare*) the meaning of individual words, since “the rise and disappearance of nearly all problems in the disciplines are dependent on the way we phrase them in language.”<sup>71</sup> Vives’s appeal to common language and a plea for observing the world of things are thus two sides of the same coin. When early modern philosophers such as Descartes, Gassendi (who mentioned Vives explicitly as one of the sources that helped him to break away from the “sect of the Aristotelians”),<sup>72</sup> Hobbes, and Leibniz criticized Scholastic terminology, while often reducing the Scholastics’ metaphysical apparatus, they were doing something that was fully in line with the spirit of humanists such as Valla and Vives.

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<sup>70</sup> *De prima philosophia* I (M 3:193).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.: “itaque diligenter communis verborum usus est animadvertendus, ex quo plurimae in omnibus disciplinis et existunt quaestiones, et profligantur.”

<sup>72</sup> *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos*, in *The Selected Works of Pierre Gassendi*, ed. and trans. Craig B. Brush (New York: Johnson, 1972), 18. In his *Syntagma philosophicum*, Gassendi approves of Valla’s reduction of the Aristotelian categories; *Opera Omnia* (Lyon, 1658), 1: 181b. For Leibniz’s engagement with Nizolio see Nauta, “Anti-essentialism and the Rhetoricization of Knowledge,” 60–62.